


BROADBAND EXPANSION GRANT APPLICATION

For Fiscal Year 2022

Primary Applicant (Name and Address): Tri-County Communications Cooperative, Inc. 417 5 th Ave N. PO Box 578 Strum, WI 54770	Applications MUST be UPLOADED to ERF via the Commission's website, http://psc.wi.gov/apps35/ERF_upload/content/mymenu.aspx . Refer to section 2.3 for detailed instructions. Applications are due and MUST be uploaded to ERF no later than: March 17, 2022 at 4:00pm (16:00) Central Time. Late applications will not be accepted.	
Contact for further information: PSCStatebroadbandoffice@wisconsin.gov		
Date: December 1, 2021		
<p>The Public Service Commission of Wisconsin is seeking applications for Broadband Expansion Grants. The Commission may award one or more grants during Fiscal Year 2022 to public and private entities that meet the eligibility requirements set forth in Wis. Stat. § 196.504. This grant round will be funded with bond proceeds authorized by the Wisconsin Building Commission pursuant to Wis. Stat. § 13.48(30). As such, successful applicants are subject to the requirements of Wis. Stat. § 13.48(30). Successful applicants will demonstrate a clear and achievable plan to improve broadband communications services in one or more underserved areas in the State.</p>		
<p>Applicant Certification: In signing this application, the undersigned verifies under penalty of perjury that the Applicant and its employees and agents have not, either directly or indirectly, entered into any agreement or participated in any collusion or otherwise taken any action in restraint of free competition with respect to this application; that no attempt has been made to induce any other person or firm to submit or not to submit an application; that this application has been independently arrived at without collusion with any other proposer, competitor or potential competitor; that this application has not been knowingly disclosed prior to the opening of applications to any other applicant or competitor; that all of the responses and representations of Applicant in this application are true and correct to the best of the undersigned's knowledge, information, and belief; and that Applicant agrees to, accepts, and will comply with all of the terms and conditions respecting this application and any award of a broadband expansion grant as may be established in a grant award Agreement.</p>		
Name of Authorized Representative (Type or Print) Cheryl Rue	Title CEO	Phone () (715) 695-2691
Signature of Authorized Representative 	Date 3-15-2022	

SUMMARY OF GRANT APPLICATION

Primary Applicant Name Tri-County Communications Cooperative, Inc.	Amount of Broadband Grant Request (round to nearest dollar) \$200,000
Federal Employer Identification No. 39-1024048	Amount of Matching Funds Pledged (round to nearest dollar) \$50,000
Contact Name and Title Cheryl Rue, CEO	Total Cost of Proposed Project (round to nearest dollar) \$250,000
Telephone Number (715) 695-2691	Project Name Town of Clear Creek FTTH
E-mail Address(es) crue@tccpro.net	Type of Proposed Broadband Service (FTTH, Cable, DSL, etc.) FTTH
Grant Manager, if different than Primary Applicant N/A	Type of Proposed Project (Last-mile, Middle-Mile, backbone, other) Last-mile
Grant Manager Contact Name N/A	Grant Manager Email Address and Telephone Number N/A
If the application proposes a public-private partnership, list the names, addresses, and FEINs of the partner companies or organizations N/A	
Brief Project Description (2 sentences) Tri-County Communications Cooperative, Inc. will build a 5-mile FTTH network that will serve 18 Underserved/Unserved locations in the Town of Clear Creek in southern Eau Claire County.	
Maximum Proposed Download Transmission Speed 10 Gbps	Maximum Proposed Upload Transmission Speed 10 Gbps
Minimum Proposed Download Speed to Customer Location 100 Mbps	Minimum Proposed Upload Transmission Speed to Customer Location 100 Mbps
County or Counties served by this project Eau Claire County	Community or Communities served by this project Town of Clear Creek

List of the broadband service providers, if any, currently serving the area the applicant proposes to serve CenturyLink/Lumen	
Does proposed project serve an <u>unserved</u> area of the State, as defined in <u>Section 1.4</u> of the application instruction? (yes/no) Yes	Is the Applicant certified as a Broadband Forward! Community or Telecommuter Forward! Community, or does the grant project propose to serve a Broadband Forward! Community or Telecommuter Forward! Community? (yes/no) Broadband Forward! Eau Claire County Town of Clear Creek No
For last mile projects or component the expected number of Business Locations that will have access to the improved broadband service (i.e., total business locations passed or with new service access). 2	For last mile projects or components the expected number of Residential Locations that will have access to the improved broadband service (i.e., total residential locations passed or with new service access). 16
Of the improved business locations, how many locations are <u>unserved</u> ? 0	Of the improved residential locations, how many are <u>unserved</u> ? 3
For providers that are eligible telecommunications carriers will the proposed broadband service be available to Lifeline customers? (yes/no) Yes	Are there any programs available for low-income households to access low-cost service or discounts? (yes/no) Yes
Is the internet service provider currently participating in the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program? (yes/no) No Tri-County does participate in the ACP program.	Is the internet service provider currently participating in the Department of Public Instruction and CESA purchasing's Digital Learning Bridge? (yes/no) No
Did the internet service provider participate in the Public Service Commission's voluntary Broadband Coverage Data Collection in 2012? (yes/no) Yes	

Summary of Project Budget and Funding Statement

FY22 Broadband Expansion Grant Application Budget & Income Summary



Please complete this form using Microsoft Excel. A PDF copy must be attached to your application as page four. In addition, this form must also be uploaded to ERF in Excel format.

Grant Summary

Grant Applicant:	Project:
Tri-County Communications Cooperative, Inc.	Town of Clear Creek FTTH

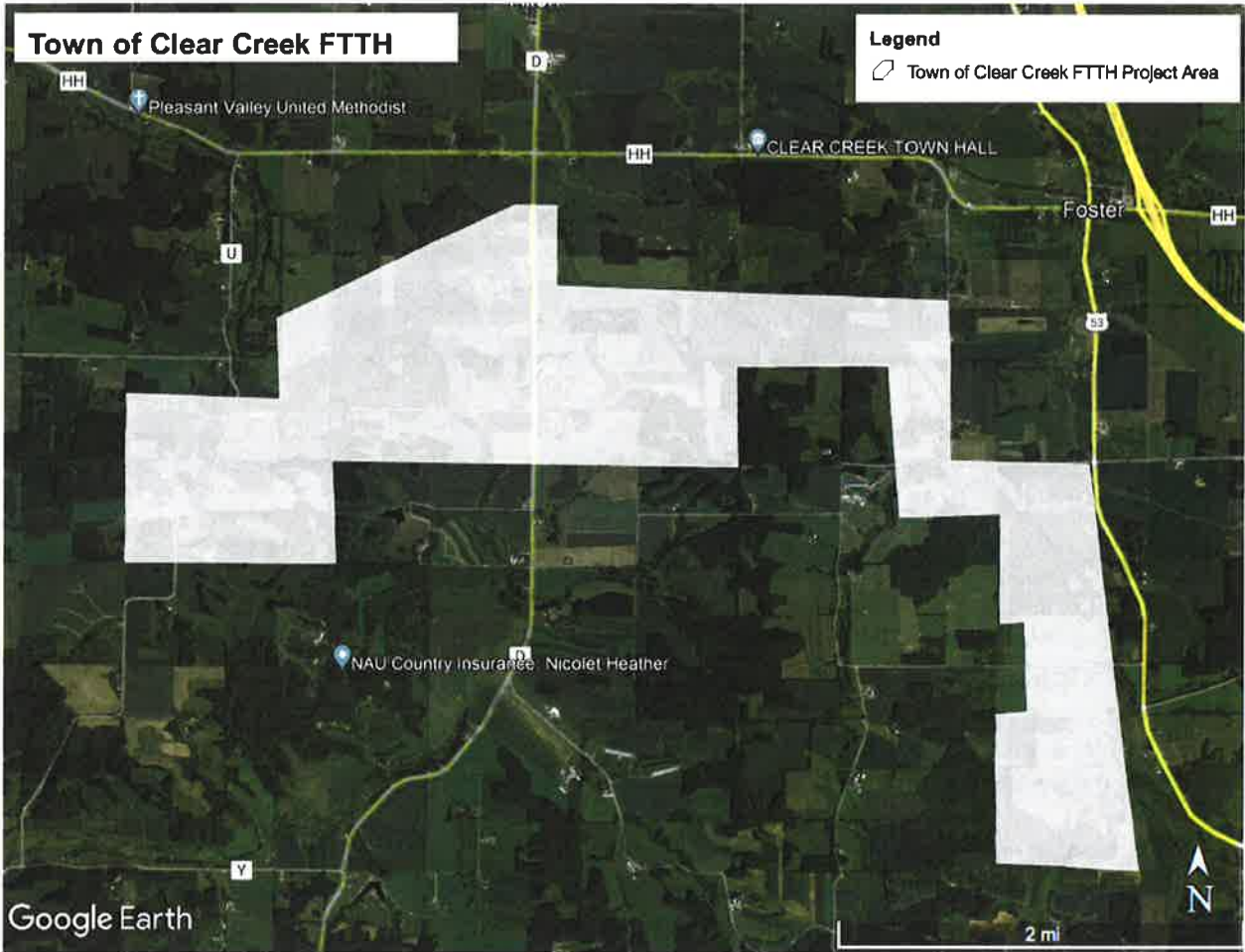
Budget

Line:	Description / Category:	Grant Funds:	Match:	Total:
1	Contractual, Consultant Fees	\$ 182,400.00	\$ 45,600.00	\$ 228,000.00
2	Equipment	\$ 5,200.00	\$ 1,300.00	\$ 6,500.00
3	Supplies	\$ 4,000.00	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 5,000.00
4	Labor (Salary, Fringe)	\$ 8,000.00	\$ 2,000.00	\$ 10,000.00
5	Permitting, Licensing Fees	\$ 400.00	\$ 100.00	\$ 500.00
6	Travel			\$ -
7	Other			\$ -
Total:		\$ 200,000.00	\$ 50,000.00	\$ 250,000.00
20.0% match requested				

Pledged Contributions

#:	Entity:	Entity Type:	Pledge Type:	Pledge:
1	Tri-County Communications Cooperative, Inc.	Applicant	Cash	\$ 50,000.00
2		Applicant	Cash	
3		Other	Cash	
4		Other	Cash	
5		Other	Cash	\$ -
6		Other	Cash	\$ -
7		Other	Cash	\$ -
8		Other	Cash	\$ -
9				
10				
Total:				\$ 50,000.00

Project Map



Executive Summary

Tri-County Communications Cooperative, Inc. ("Tri-County") is applying for a Wisconsin Broadband Expansion Grant ("Grant") to extend its Fiber-To-The-Home ("FTTH") network in the Town of Clear Creek ("Town") in Eau Claire County ("Project"). The Project will provide FTTH Broadband to 18 locations. Three of those in an unserved area and 15 locations in an underserved area. The Town of Clear Creek is located in the south central part of Eau Claire County. This Project proposes a FTTH Gigabit Passive Optical Network ("GPON"), with a minimum broadband speed of 100 Mbps symmetrical, to the locations in the Town that have no broadband providers providing reliable broadband speeds of at least 25 Mbps down and 3 Mbps up to 100% of the Project area. The Project will construct a 5-mile fiber network covering 4.5 square mile area in the Town. See page 5 for a detailed map of the Project Area. The estimated construction cost for the Project is \$250,000. The Grant request in this Application is \$200,000 or 80% of the new construction costs. The balance of the construction costs of \$50,000 will be paid for by Tri-County.

The Project area is an "island" created between current Tri-County serving areas and RDOF awarded areas being built as FTTH by Charter/Spectrum.

Tri-County currently provides FTTH to parts of both of these Town. Tri-County has received many calls from residents in the underserved/unserved area looking for an affordable and reliable option for broadband service. The Project would serve those residents and provide a pathway to service many more homes in this area in the future. The Project area will be costly to construct and the underserved/unserved area may never be served without a Wisconsin Broadband Access Grant. Tri-County is unaware of any plans to provide facility based broadband service to the Project area by any provider by December 31, 2024.

As an Eligible Telecommunications Carrier Tri-County provides discounts to resident customers for broadband service in accordance with Section PSC 160.062 Lifeline Program of the Wisconsin Administrative Code and FCC regulations for Lifeline support. Tri-County works directly with all local school districts to identify students that are not connected to a broadband service, and determine if Tri-County has facilities at that student's home location to be provided at reasonable rates. Tri-County has registered with the Affordable Connectivity Program in an effort to provide broadband services to those that qualify for that program.

If Tri-County were successful in the award of a grant for the Town of Clear Creek FTTH Project, construction would start in the summer of 2023. Completion of construction would be projected for late fall of 2023, with installation of customer services through the winter of 2023/2024. Projected completion of the Project would be spring of 2024.

3.2 Mandatory application requirements

3.2.1 Applicant identification and contact information

- a. The name and address of the entity applying for the grant, and the mailing address, telephone number and e-mail address of one or more contact persons representing the applicant.**

Name of Entity: Tri-County Communications Cooperative, Inc.

Mailing Address: 417 5th Avenue North

PO Box 578

Strum, Wisconsin 54770

Main Telephone Number: 715-695-2691

Contacts: - Buck Webb, COO – bwebb@tccpro.net

- Cheryl Rue, CEO – crue@tccpro.net

- b. If the application proposes a public-private partnership, the identity and contact information for all application partners.**

A public-private partnership is not proposed for this project.

- c. The application must show that the applicant is an organization, a telecommunications utility, or a city, village, town, or county that has established a legal partnership or joint venture arrangement with an otherwise qualified organization or telecommunications utility, and as such meets the eligibility requirements set forth in Wis. Stat. § 196.504(1).**

Tri-County Communications Cooperative, Inc is an Incumbent Local Exchange Carrier ("ILEC") certified to provide telecommunications service in the State of Wisconsin pursuant to Section 196.50(2)(b) of the Wisconsin State Statute. Tri-County's PSCW Utility # is 5950 and currently serves the Wisconsin study area #330960.

3.2.2 Description of the project

- a. A static map and description of the area of the State that will be affected by the proposed project.**

The map must be accompanied by:

- **A URL reference to a spatial file (Geodatabase / Feature Class, or Shapefile or KML) showing the proposed service area. A spatial file including census blocks that intersect the proposed project area is also acceptable.**

The Map on page 5 of the application shows the proposed broadband Project area.

A KML file of the proposed project area has been emailed to pscbroadbanddata@wisconsin.gov

- b. If the project area lies within a census block designated as served on the PSC Broadband Map, provide additional documentation to demonstrate the actual broadband service that is available in the proposed project area.**

The Project area is underserved/unserved per the PSC Broadband Map

- c. An explanation of how the proposed project will increase broadband access. Include information about the:**

- **Potential and expected number of households served, including number of unserved and underserved locations.**

Potential households in the unserved area are 3. Expected households to be served are 3. Potential households in the underserved area are 13. Expected households to be served are 10.

- **Potential and expected number of businesses served, including number of unserved and underserved locations.**
- Potential businesses in the unserved area are 2. Expected to businesses to be served are 2. Potential businesses in the underserved area are 0.

- **Expected number of seasonal residents and tourists served.**

Number of seasonal residents and tourists are unknown.

- **Estimated download and upload speed of the broadband service packages available for purchase.**

Tri-County will provide broadband down/up speeds at a minimum of 100 Mbps/100 Mbps with 10 Gbps available to all locations.

- d. A statement whether the proposed project is targeting the “last mile,” “middle mile,” or backbone portion of the broadband infrastructure.**

The proposed project is targeted as a “last mile”, dedicated broadband infrastructure. Tri-County is currently providing wireline broadband service and has access to adequate middle mile and backbone Internet access.

- e. A description of the broadband service to be provided, including estimated download and upload speeds, whether the speed is based on dedicated or shared bandwidth, and the technology that will be used. This description may be illustrated by a map or schematic diagram, as appropriate.**

Tri-County is currently providing dedicated wireline broadband services using a 100% fiber network. Tri-County will provide broadband service using a Fiber-To-The-Home network with Gigabit Passive Optical Network ("GPON") technology. This fiber network will be similar to the fiber network currently in place and used in the current Tri-County service territory. The latest technology will be used to provide the highest quality of service. The Project fiber network will be connected to the existing fiber network and broadband electronics used to provide broadband services in the Tri-County service territory. Available broadband speeds and costs will be as follows.

100 Mbps x 100 Mbps \$49.95
 250 Mbps x 250 Mbps \$69.95
 500 Mbps x 500 Mbps \$99.95
 1 Gbps 1 Gbps \$199.95

f. **Middle Mile project information – not applicable**

g. **A schedule by which the applicant intends to complete the components of the proposed project. The project period is up to 24 months.**

If the grant application for the Project is approved in 2022, Tri-County is proposing the following schedule:

August – September, 2022	Order equipment/Staking
May – July, 2023	Bury main line cable
May – October, 2023	Install electronics at customer locations
August – December, 2023	Turn up Service
February 2024	Request final payment of Grant Funds

3.2.3 Itemized Budget (all amounts should be rounded to the nearest dollar)

a. In addition to the Summary of Project Budget that is included as page 3, applicants should include a price list or quote for any equipment the applicant intends to purchase, including capital expenditures. The application should also indicate whether any facilities involved would be owned, rented, or leased.

Project Construction Costs:

The Town of Clear Creek FTTH Project summary of the construction cost for the fiber network. All fiber construction will be provided by a third-party contractor. All of the network will be owned by Tri-County.

<u>Description</u>		<u>Total Cost</u>
Buried Fiber Network		
Mainline fiber material and construction	\$ 144,000	
Drops material and construction	\$ 84,000	\$ 228,000
Electronics and Equipment		
Splitters	\$ 200	
GPON SFP's/CPE Electronics	\$ 6300	\$ 6500

Labor/Engineering/ONT installation	\$ 10,000	\$10,000
Supplies	\$ 5000	\$ 5000
Highway Permitting	\$ 500	<u>\$ 500</u>
Total		\$250,000

- b. The application must show that the grant, if awarded, will not subsidize the expenses of a telecommunications provider or the monthly bills of telecommunications customers. For purposes of this grant program, subsidize means a contribution to the operating costs, including profit, of the telecommunications provider.

The grant funds requested will not subsidize the expense to provide telecommunications services to end user customers. The grant funds requested in this Application will only be used to help pay for a portion of the fiber network and electronics used to provide broadband. No grant funds will be used for monthly recurring operating costs for broadband or telecommunications services.

- c. The application must show that the grant funds requested will be used for the sole purpose of constructing broadband infrastructure in the underserved areas covered by the application. Construction of broadband infrastructure may include any of the following:

- Project planning that takes place during the performance period.
- Obtaining construction permits.
- Construction of facilities, including construction of both “middle mile” and “last mile” infrastructure.
- Installation and testing of the broadband service.

Grant funds requested will all be used for the sole purpose of constructing broadband infrastructure in the underserved areas in the Town of Clear Creek. This includes project planning that takes place during the performance period; obtaining construction permits; construction of the last mile infrastructure; and installation and testing of the broadband service.

3.2.4 Priority factors supporting the application

- a. **Matching funds.** A description of the matching funds the applicant will invest in the proposed project, if any. For each element, indicate the type of match (cash, salary expense, or in-kind contribution). If the application is submitted by a partnership, identify the partner responsible for providing each element of the proposed matching funds. *Note: The requirement for this information is satisfied via inclusion of the completed Funding Statement as page 4 of the application.*

- If available, provide documentation to support an offer of matching funds (minutes of a town board meeting, a letter from a prospective customer or local government official, etc.).

Tri-County will be providing matching funds in the amount of \$50,000 for the construction of the Town of Clear Creek FTTH Project. Detail of funds are shown in the Budget & Income Summary on page 4 of this application.

- b. **Public-private partnerships.** If the public-private partnership is memorialized in a joint venture agreement or other writing, provide a copy of that agreement. If the partnership has not been reduced to a written agreement, provide a short description of the management role, financial commitment, or other contribution to the project for each participating partner.
- In scoring this element, information regarding active engagement of diverse communities in the planning, permitting, or marketing of the project will be given weight as well.

Tri-County will manage the construction of the network, own, and maintain the network when complete. Tri-County and the Town will work together on planning of the construction to be prepared for future road projects and housing expansion. Tri-County will work with the Town on marketing and customer education so that all residents are taking advantage of the services and opportunities that FTTH broadband connection can provide. Tri-County also provides classes to customers and non-customers, called TCC-U, which educate about available services and their use with broadband. The University of Eau Claire also conducts a Digital Literacy Course for residents of Eau Claire County to promote broadband usage. Tri-County works with the University to promote this course.

- c. **Existing broadband service.** A list of the broadband service providers, if any, currently serving the area the applicant proposes to serve. In scoring this element, the following factors will be taken into account:
- The degree to which the proposed project avoids duplicating existing broadband infrastructure.
 - The application of a wireless broadband service provider proposing significant overlap with existing broadband service in addition to service to an unserved area will not be given priority consideration.
 - Provide a list of all landline broadband service providers (DSL, cable or fiber to the home) and fixed wireless broadband service providers that overlap the footprint of the proposed broadband project.
 - If known, provide an estimate of the customers within the proposed footprint that are served by competing landline and fixed wireless broadband service providers, and the download/upload speeds offered by those competing service providers.

- **Provide a list of mobile wireless broadband service providers that overlap the footprint of the proposed project.**
- **If known, provide an estimate of the customers within the proposed footprint that are served by competing mobile wireless broadband service providers, and the download/upload speeds offered by those competing service providers.**

The existing broadband provider located within the Project area is CenturyLink/Lumen. Per the Wisconsin PSC Broadband Map, the highest speed shown available to the residents in the underserved project area is 100 mbps x 10 mbps. It is the belief of Tri-County and the residents of the Project area that these speeds are not available to 100% of the locations in the underserved area, and are based on Census Blocks versus availability. The PSC Broadband map shows in the unserved areas of the project, CenturyLink/Lumen provides speeds of 10 mbps x 1 mbps, with some areas showing no broadband available. These services are provided through XDSL technology, which is a legacy technology that does not provide reliable broadband service. Because copper loops are used for XDSL technology these broadband speeds are significantly reduced as the length of the copper loop increases. The XDSL technology is also not scalable to the broadband speeds needed in the future, and cannot address the distance limitations it has. Tri-County's position, based on comments and letters of support from residents within the Project area, is that there is not a provider providing reliable broadband service of 25 Mbps down and 3 Mbps up in the Project area. This is also supported by the Town commitment to partner with Tri-County, along with the County's contribution, to bring broadband to the underserved/unserved areas.

Current in the unserved areas of the Project.

Wireline

None

Fixed Wireless

United States Cellular Corporation 2 Mbps x .064 Mbps

Current underserved areas of the Project.

Wireline

CenturyLink 100 Mbps x 10 Mbps

Fixed Wireless

United States Cellular Corporation 2 Mbps x .064 Mbps

- d. **Project impact. A description of the geographic area and the population, both in terms of absolute numbers and likely users, which will be served by the proposed project. Indicate the number of anticipated residential and business customers in the project area, if known. Explain the speed and quality of internet service that will be available. Include information about the range of packages available for purchase. Provide details on any low-income access programs and steps the project will take to support adoption.**

The Town of Clear Creek resides in southern Eau Claire County. The Project covers 4.5 square miles of rural rolling hills and farmland. The project will bring last mile FTTH broadband to 18 residential locations and 2 businesses. The Town is located south of the City of Eau Claire. The Town is a growing area for people looking to work in Eau Claire or telecommute and live in these rural areas. The Project area is served by the school districts of Osseo-Fairchild, Eleva-Strum, and Eau Claire. The University of Eau Claire and Chippewa Valley Technical College serve the residents and recent high school graduates with a chance to attend college and live at home. These students can benefit by having the connectivity required to do their schoolwork and connect with instructors at any time during the day. It is the Town and County's desire to have FTTH broadband connections to 100% of its residents. This grant will be a step in the right direction for the needs of today and tomorrow. With the assistance of the State Broadband Expansion Grant, this can become a reality. To continue to draw people to live in these areas, reliable, affordable broadband is necessary. With this project, Tri-County will be able to provide reliable speeds at a minimum of 100 mbps x 100 mbps and up to 10 Gbps. Currently available broadband speeds and costs will be as follows.

100 Mbps x 100 Mbps	\$49.95
250 Mbps x 250 Mbps	\$69.95
500 Mbps x 500 Mbps	\$99.95
1 Gbps x 1 Gbps	\$199.95

As an Eligible Telecommunications Carrier Tri-County provides discounts to resident customers for broadband service in accordance with Section PSC 160.062 Lifeline Program of the Wisconsin Administrative Code and FCC regulations for Lifeline support. Tri-County works directly with all local school districts to identify students that are not connected to a broadband service, and determine if Tri-County has facilities at that student's home location to be provided at reasonable rates. Tri-County has registered with the Affordable Connectivity Program in an effort to provide broadband services to those that qualify for that program.

e. **Scalability.** A description of how the proposed project could expand or improve the broadband service it delivers, while maintaining the quality of its broadband service. This description should include specific projected increases in the following parameters that are known at the time of the application:

- The number of users.
- The number of network nodes.
- The number of services provided.
- The geographic area served by the project.
- The number of aggregation points in middle mile project.

This description may also include a discussion of possible growth potential that is outside the commitment the applicant is making as part of its application.

Tri-County currently provides broadband to served portions of the Town. We provide this with a 100% fiber to the home network. Tri-County can effectively build on existing

network in place in our served area to expand broadband service to the Project area. Tri-County has enough middle mile capacity to provide the broadband services at speed levels that are required today, and well into the future. Along with broadband services, all residents of the Town would be able to have access to telephone and television services that Tri-County provides. Eau Claire County is working very hard with all communities to bring reliable broadband to 100% of its residents. This Project will be built to allow expansion in to adjacent areas at any time that funding and need would become available.

- f. **Economic development.** A description of how the proposed project will promote job growth or retention, expand the property tax base or improve the overall economic vitality of the municipality or region. This description may be supplemented with a letter from one or more persons discussing the potential economic impact the project could have for that individual or business. In scoring this element, the following factors will be taken into account:
- A discussion of potential economic impact the project could have for an individual business located in the project area.
 - An explanation of how an improved download and upload transmission speed could better support a specific business in the project area.
 - An explanation of the likely impact improved broadband service could have on residential property values, supported by local sales data if available.
 - A demonstration of how improved broadband service to a residential portion of the project could benefit a telecommuting population.
 - A demonstration of how the speeds and service being offered by the project fits with current and future economic needs of the community and local businesses.

Broadband is a desired service for residential and businesses as they chose locations. The Town is served by three Wisconsin School Districts. Teachers and students alike that reside in the Town need reliable broadband. Education at the K-12 level, and on to the post-secondary schooling, have found a strong reliance on broadband to bring quality education opportunities. The ability to have access to quality, reliable broadband gives residents an opportunity to live, or buy homes in these areas. This continues to drive a strong real estate market that equates to more people living in the Town and providing a tax base that helps to maintain roads and other infrastructure in the town. The Town does lie in a desirable area for those that have the ability to telecommute for work. The area includes beautiful rolling hills for hiking, hunting, and other recreational opportunities. Providing reliable broadband is essential to all that choose to live in this area. Located in the project area are farms, home photography studio, Income Tax business, and telecommuters. There are residents that would like to work from home and like to start home based businesses. One letter of support included in the attachments states, "If we had broadband, I would be able to apply for jobs that work from home". Without reliable broadband, these things cannot happen. New homes and home sales will rely on reliable broadband that FTTH can provide.

- g. **Effect upon broadband service to adjacent areas.** A description of whether the proposed project will or will not impair the ability of a broadband service provider or competing broadband service provider to extend broadband service to areas adjacent to the proposed project area.

The Town of Clear Creek FTTH Project proposed by Tri-County will have no impact on another provider's ability to provide service in adjacent areas to the Project area. The Town is very rural and is very costly to build, and probably would never be built, without support of the Wisconsin Broadband Expansion Grant. The rolling hills and heavy timbered areas of much of the project area, limit the use of fixed wireless as a service that can provide to 100% of the project area, or adjacent areas. The project area is an "island" located between Tri-County served areas and Charter/Spectrum awarded RDOF areas.

3.2.5 Other information supporting the application

- a. **A description of applicant's history or experience constructing broadband communications facilities in the State and elsewhere.**
- **If applicable, an applicant must comment upon the status of all prior broadband expansion grant projects, including the type of broadband technology used, the facility route actually built or installed, the number of residential and business customers actually connected, and other relevant details of the prior project(s).**
 - **An applicant may also comment on broadband construction projects undertaken in prior years that were not funded in part by the Broadband Expansion Grant program.**

Tri-County Communications has been providing telecommunications service in its designated ILEC territory since 1964. In 1996 Tri-County started offering internet services. In 2006 Tri-County merged with Western Wisconsin Communications Cooperative, the only Cable TV cooperative in the nation, and the first in the world to provide a distance learning solution that served 7 local school districts. In 2008 Tri-County started a FTTH project to roughly 4000 residences and businesses in its ILEC territories. This project was funded in part with a \$17 million Rural Utilities Service loan and was completed in 2014. It is now serving all residents with a minimum speed of 100 Mbps x 100 Mbps, with speeds up to 1 Gbps available. Tri-County has also been working since 2006 to replace the coaxial service outside the ILEC areas to a FTTH network. Over the last 14 years, Tri-County has invested in excess of \$30 million in broadband upgrades to our members. Tri-County is in a strong financial position and has reserves in excess of \$6,000,000 to help pay for the costs of the Project.

In 2014, Tri-County was recognized at the National level as a Smart Rural Community by NTCA – the Rural Broadband Association – for our ongoing efforts to improve the data network and overall technology culture in our area. Tri-County has also received the

“GIG Certified” designation by NTCA, which certifies that the Tri-County network is capable of speeds up to 1 Gigabit per second (Gbps).

In 2021, Tri-County was awarded two Wisconsin Broadband Expansion Grants. The Town of Drammen FTTH project was a partnership with the Town of Drammen, and brought service to 162 unserved/underserved locations in the town. Construction of this project completed in early February of 2022. Currently, approximately 80 of the locations have been connected, with the remainder to be completed through 2022. Tri-County was also awarded a grant in 2021 for Newcomb Valley FTTH outside of the City of Arcadia. This project is 90% complete and installation of services to customers is planned to start in March of 2022.

In 2021, Tri-County was awarded two ARPA Broadband Expansion grants. The Town of Naples FTTH in Buffalo County and the Town of Alma FTTH in Jackson County are scheduled to start in the spring and summer of 2021. Combined, these projects will provide reliable FTTH broadband to 518 locations.

b. A description of how the proposed project will or will not duplicate existing broadband infrastructure.

The Town of Clear Creek FTTH project will not duplicate existing broadband service in the Project area. It is Tri-County and the Town position that reliable broadband connections that meet the requirement of 25 mbps x 3 mbps are not available to all of the residents and businesses in the project area.

c. A description of an applicant’s financial ability to undertake the proposed broadband construction project.

This may include information such as the number of years the company has been in operation, documentation of successful completion of similar infrastructure projects, evidence that sufficient funds are available to cover project expenditure and match, customer turn-over rates, and credit rating.

In Section 3.2.5 (a) above we detailed the history of Tri-County Communications and documented successful completion of similar infrastructure projects. Tri-County is in a strong financial position and has reserves in excess of \$6,000,000 to help pay for the costs of the Project. Tri-County has seen an increase in membership of 11% over the last two years with an 86% take rate of our broadband services. Tri-County was able to pay off its \$17 million RUS loan for the ILEC FTTH build in 2020, and currently has no debt.

d. This is not a middle mile project.

e. This is not a middle mile project.

f. A description of how the proposed project will affect the ability of individuals to access health care service from home, including any impact upon the costs of those services.

- **Specific information from a hospital or clinic in the project area that currently uses or intends to use home-based telemedicine equipment to enhance access health care service would best illustrate this point.**

The proposed project will provide that reliable broadband connection that residents need for the future of home healthcare. With reliable broadband to a home, a resident can have access to virtual meetings with care providers. This can eliminate the need for patients to make those visits to clinics and hospitals. Monitoring of health conditions like blood pressure, diabetes, and oxygen levels can be done remotely, and in real time to possibly offer lifesaving opportunities. These great technologies can help residents stay in their homes longer as they age, and give their loved ones the comfort of knowing they are cared for.

National studies provide evidence of cost savings with the use of telehealth services. In a pre-COVID-19 study of 40,000 Cigna beneficiaries, the 20,000 beneficiaries who used the MDLive telehealth platform had 17% lower costs when compared with non-virtual care. Virtual care users also experienced a 36% net reduction in ED use per 1,000 people compared to non-virtual care users ([Healthcare IT News](#)). The National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA) [Report of the Taskforce on Telehealth Policy](#) discusses a variety of evidence that the use of telehealth services lowers the overall cost of care. We are confident that this national data can be extrapolated to this project area.

g. A description of how the proposed project will affect the ability of students to access educational opportunities from home.

- **Specific information on the likely number of students that will benefit from improved access to educational opportunities from home would be useful.**
- **Specific information regarding educational programs that are currently available for students in the project area would be useful.**

The Project area within the Town are parts of Osseo-Fairchild, Eleva-Strum, and Eau Claire School Districts. It is not known how many students will benefit at this time. Schools are looking to develop programs that can be delivered virtually to students. This makes it important that every location have access to reliable, affordable broadband.

The University of Eau Claire and the Chippewa Valley Technical College serve the area of the Town very well. As students graduate from high school and choose to move on to secondary schooling, many chose to stay in the area because they can stay at home and save money. Having access to a strong and reliable broadband connection provides them to be able to do class work while in the comfort of their own home.

h. A description of actions taken by a city, village, town, or county in support of the grant application that have not been discussed in the context of a public-private partnership above, including but not limited to:

- **The contribution of funds, easements or permissions to use publicly-owned real estate, construction materials, or other items of value to the grant project.**

- **The contribution of in-kind assistance to the grant project in the form of waived fees and expenses for obtaining use permits and permissions.**
- **The contribution of other items of benefit to the grant project, such as public outreach and education, vehicles, water, etc.**
- **Certification as a Broadband Forward! Community or Telecommuter Forward! Community.**

The County of Eau Claire is a Broadband Forward! Community. The County and the Town have worked with broadband utilities on permitting to help with the construction process. Fees have been lowered and/or waived to ease in the process and cost.

i. Letters and messages in support of the application submitted by prospective customers, local government officials, and other interested persons

Letters of support are included in the attachments portion of the Application.

j. Any other equitable factor that the applicant desires to discuss, including one or more of the factors in Wis. Stat. § 196.03(6) that the applicant believes its project would advance. In discussing this element, the following information may be useful:

- **Technical support and training materials that the applicant intends to provide.**
- **Information that the applicant intends to use to promote better broadband adoption and use.**
- **A description of a program or outreach to provide assistance to individuals of low income.**

Tri-County provides various programs and outreach to provide assistance to individuals of low income, including the following:

- As an Eligible Telecommunications Carrier Tri-County provides discounts to resident customers for broadband service in accordance with Section PSC 160.062 Lifeline Program of the Wisconsin Administrative Code and FCC regulations for Lifeline support.
- Tri-County also works directly with all local school districts to identify students that are not connected to a broadband service and determine if Tri-County has facilities at that student's home location.

With the increased use of technology for daily activities and the movement by many businesses and schools to operating remotely during the pandemic, broadband has become even more critical for people across the country to carry out their daily lives. Tri-County's minimum internet speed is 100 Mbps symmetrical. Tri-County's all fiber optic infrastructure will sufficiently meet household needs, including the ability to support the simultaneous use of work, education, and health applications, and also sufficiently meet increasing household demands for bandwidth.

Information that Tri-County intends to use to promote better broadband adoption and use. We complete premise visits to every address to discuss Fiber-to-the-Home (FTTH) with all of our grant projects. We provide the new customers with a packet of information, including the stages of building our all-fiber optic network to them. At that time, customers sign our permission slips to bury fiber optics on their property, and more often than not, customers select the services bundle they want to have installed. There is no need to lock the customers into any contract; we know bringing a future proof all-fiber network is mission critical. Our mindset is to build it once and to build it right.

Tri-County realizes the importance of the services we provide to those in our communities. As a Cooperative, we have a responsibility to our members to provide these services at the lowest cost and to work with all current and prospective members on the best way to use these services. Tri-County provides information on how to enroll programs for low-income individuals through Lifeline Support and the Affordable Connectivity Program. Tri-County also provides educational opportunities through our TCC-U Classes along with educational and instructional videos on internet use.

Acceptance of Affordable Connectivity Program

Welcome to the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP). Your election to participate is complete. You have been assigned the following Study Area Code(s) (SAC) for the ACP:

Provider Name/Affiliate Name	SPIN*	Study Area Code	State
Tri-County Communications Cooperative, Inc.	143001845	833101	WI
Tri-West Communications	200000806	833102	WI

Eau Claire Energy Cooperative

Your Touchstone Energy® Partner



January 31, 2022

Lynn Thompson, President and CEO
Eau Claire Energy Cooperative
8214 U.S. Hwy 12
Fall Creek WI 54742

Stephany Powell Coker
Secretary to the Commission
Public Service Commission of Wisconsin
4822 Madison Yards Way
North Tower – 6th Floor
Madison, WI 53705-9100

Re: Letter of support for TCC grant application – Town of Pleasant Valley and Town of Clear Creek

Ms. Coker:

Eau Claire Energy Cooperative (ECEC) provides this letter of support for the Town of Pleasant Valley and Town of Clear Creek Broadband grant application.

ECEC is enthusiastically supporting this grant application. We have a history of working with TCC on other projects in our area. They will provide excellent broadband services to the underserved residents of these two townships. The residents in this area deserve access to the same connectivity that their urban neighbors enjoy.

Please feel free to contact me if you require any additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lynn Thompson".

Lynn Thompson
President/CEO

Lucas Wiedrich
S12825 County Rd D
Strum, WI 54770

To whom it may concern:

I am writing this letter to express our interest and excitement in hearing TCC may be expanding service to our area!

We have been at living our current residence in the rural town of Clear Creek for over six years now, and despite our efforts, have yet to find suitable internet service. We have previously tried service through our satellite provider, but found it far too expensive for how unreliable it was. Based on Charter's website website, they claim to offer service in our area, but when our specific address is checked, we are told they do not go that far out into the rural communities. CenturyLink claims our area is on a waiting list, but provides no further information for when we could expect service. We've placed a down payment on the StarLink equipment, but are on a waiting list with them as well until their production abilities are back on track and our area is set up with necessary satellites. Until just recently, the same has been the case with TCC, your services just don't come out this far, which is why we were so excited to hear you may be expanding!

We have been struggling through by using our phones as hotspots or our jetpack modem through our cell phone provider. However, this isn't feasible as a permanent solution, as these too are somewhat unreliable considering cell reception in our rural area and become quite costly with excessive use and data limits. I know it seems absurd to not have internet service in this day and age, but unfortunately it's the reality we have been battling since we bought this home.

My wife manages two MLM businesses, and to do so requires a great deal of time spent online. She tries to do as much as possible on her phone, but anything more, requires us to rely on traveling to friends and family's homes who allow us to use their internet services. This is not only an inconvenience to us, but those who help us out as well. The last two years have been especially difficult. Given the new normal of living with COVID-19 around, home schooling and the ability to work from home have become a must. Without reliable internet, this was nearly impossible for us, again forcing us to rely on others or miss work entirely, resulting in costly unpaid time off as our phones and jetpacks could not keep up with the necessary requirements.

Using the internet for recreational purposes is almost out of the question as well. Apps like Netflix, Hulu, or other streaming services, which have become common place for most people, aren't even an option for us. The same goes for gadgets like smart TVs, Alexa speakers, or wifi home security systems.

Internet service, which so many take for granted these days, is something we have not been able to secure in our new home! We have had TCC as a provider in the past and were extremely satisfied with the service. We truly hope TCC is seriously considering and able to expand services to our area, specifically to the S12825 County Rd. D address. Please let us know if there is anything we can do to help make this happen or you need any more information from us.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Lucas Wiedrich

Doris Yarrington
S14200 County Rd U
Strum WI 54770

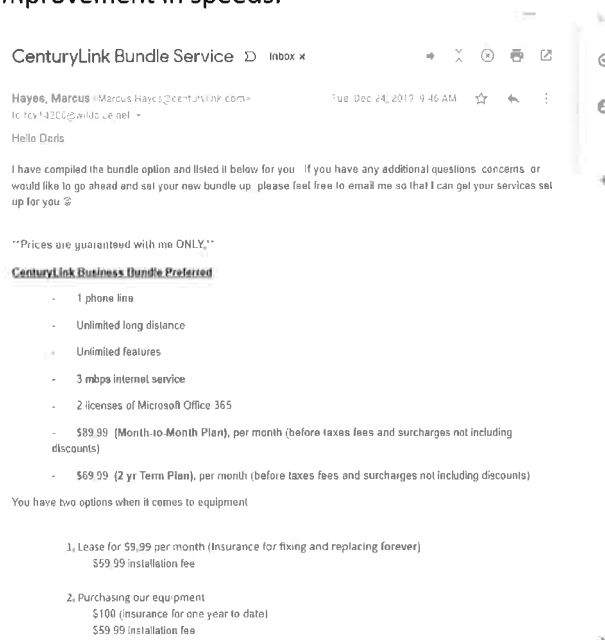
RE: Internet Availability

To Whom this Concerns:

I am writing to acknowledge my current position on availability to internet services. I have an in-home income tax business currently that I am required to download the app to my computer to run. Also, my position at NBI, Inc, where I am a Business Operation Process and Systems Analyst, offers a 'work from home' environment that I am not able to take advantage of.

Facts:

- 1) I am a CenturyLink customer for a land line phone
- 2) Internet Services through CenturyLink is not an option. Below is the last written communication I had with them on this. Beyond this I check every year with them and there has been no improvement in speeds.



- 3) CenturyLink has a hub at the end of County Rd U. Residents in that area are regularly enjoying 100 mbps of service. This hub is only 2 miles down the road on U from me.
- 4) I currently am using a satellite internet service provider. On a good day I can get 35-40 mbps. However, it is not consistent and not reliable. Frequently the connection is lost. Additionally, the router needs to be reset approximately every couple of weeks.

If I had a reliable internet service, I could:

- 1) Work from home. Currently I am working from home, but not my home. I traveled 7-10 miles to family homes where high-speed internet is available.
 - 2) I could entertain the offer of having my tax program accessible through the cloud. Right now that is not an option with the unreliable, slow connections from the satellite server.
-

I would like to petition to have a reliable, cost-effective service available to me as it is for some many others in rural areas.

Thank you for your time and consideration on this matter.

Dori Yarrington

Andrea Westphal
S13050 County Road D
Strum WI, 54770

To Whom it may concern:

I am writing this letter out of frustration for our lack of internet access in our rural township of Clear Creek, and pleading for your consideration to expand services to our area.

We have struggled endlessly for internet service in our area. In our household in the last 2 years we have tried Viasat which was completely unreliable for a very high price. We rarely had internet that worked and when it did it was so slow we were unable to do basic online tasks such as checking email. We cancelled that and resorted to jet packs/hotspots through Verizon. They too are high priced with poor coverage in rural areas like ours. We are constantly walking around our house holding a jet pack trying to get enough bars to get some internet to come in. We recently heard that Centurylink covered our area. Trying not to get our hopes up we called. It seemed easy at first, they would come out and install it the next week. My husband took off work and waited on the day they claimed they were coming. Nobody came, we have since spent hours on hold with Centurylink trying to get service that they claim is available to us. We are months later still waiting for an answer. We were told we are on a waiting list to be serviced...

In today's world having reliable internet access is something that most people don't think twice about. I tell family, friends, coworkers our trouble with the internet and they are shocked to hear this is such a struggle. My husband works from home and needs the internet often. He is often left frustrated, and having to run to family members' houses, the library, or public places, just for internet access. In a time where working from home is very common, it is not an option for us because of the lack of internet. Recreational use of the internet is certainly out of the question, we do not have Netflix, Hulu, Amazon video, etc only because our internet cannot support it. It's beyond frustrating and almost embarrassing in the year 2022.

We are begging for your consideration for expanding to our area. We have heard only positive remarks about TCC, and have longed to have it.

Thank you for your time,

Andrea Westphal

Julie Westphal <westphja@gmail.com>

Feb 9, 2022 9:28 AM



to me ▾

To Whom it May Concern:

Attached is a snip of the results of my internet speed as of 2/9/2022 and as you can see, the results are not exactly stellar.

I would like to work from home on a part-time basis in retirement, however, most positions listed that I would consider require proof of high speed internet and not the satellite connection that I have now through Hughes Net.

Please seriously consider our area as a worthy of Tri County internet expansion.

Thank you,

Julie Westphal

716-533-2364 📞



Email from Roberta Reed, E7396 E Elm Rd.

On Mon, Mar 14, 2022, 11:37 AM Roberta Reed <rjrwer2000@gmail.com> wrote:
I wanted to reach out and say that my family and I are interested in the internet from you if you are able to offer to our area. We currently only have internet through our phone lines for both personal and my work. The speed that we have is currently so slow that I am unable to perform some of my tasks due to the lag. We have been notified that TCC was considering supplying internet to this area, and I wanted to let you know that not only would I be interested in it for our personal internet but United Healthcare would also be interested in using it to supply my work line. Thank you and please feel free to contact me if you have any further questions.

-Roberta Reed